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PROGRAM This Week with David Brinkley STATION WJLA-TV
ABC Network

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SUBJECT An Interview with Amin Gemayel

SAM DONALDSON: The latest round of killing and political crisis in the Middle East began when Bashir Gemayel, leader of the Christian Phalange faction and President-elect of Lebanon, was assassinated. Now his older brother, Amin Gemayel, who is 40, has been elected to take his place.

ABC's Jim Hickey yesterday conducted the first U.S. television interview of the new President since he assumed his office this week.

JIM HICKEY: President Gemayel, good morning and thank you for sharing some of your time with us today.

PRESIDENT AMIN GEMAYEL: You're welcome.

HICKEY: Let's start by discussing the foreign forces that are in Lebanon. We're speaking of the PLO, the Syrians, and the Israelis. You have said that you want those foreign forces out of Lebanon as soon as possible. How can that be done?

PRESIDENT GEMAYEL: The most important is not to obtain the withdrawal of those forces from Lebanon. The most important is the establishing, to establish a real sovereignty, independence on the ten thousand and more kilometers. Lebanon needs to recover its sovereignty and its independence. And you can't reach this goal without obtaining the withdrawal of the Palestinians, the Syrians, and the Israelis from Lebanon.

Now we have obtained the first step. The first step is to stop the war and the fighting. For the moment, the town is calm. And we obtained the cease-fire, the complete cease-fire.

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And now the second stage, the second step, it will be the withdrawal of the Palestinian, Syrian, and Israelis from Lebanon.

Here, [unintelligible] as a Lebanese people, and especially the Lebanese resistance, was able to maintain the minimum of sovereignty on the Lebanese land. And now we are -- we thank the U.S. Government, and especially the President Reagan, who try to help, and is now trying to help Lebanon to obtain the withdrawal of all the foreign forces, and also to reestablish the freedom, independence and democracy and sovereignty on the Lebanese land. The action of President Reagan was very, very important for us, and we appreciate everything he did, through his special envoy Mr. Philip Habib.

We hope that this effort will continue, he will pursue this effort, and especially at this specific time, today and tomorrow. Mr. Reagan sent a message, sent to me a message. It was very kind. And he expressed his full support. He expressed his support to the Lebanese sovereignty and independence and the withdrawal -- also, he talked about the withdrawal of all the forces from Lebanon. I hope that he will succeed in giving us the real backing and it will be a major help and major effort behind the Lebanese government and the new regime in Lebanon.

HICKEY: How long do you think it would take for the withdrawal of those forces, the Palestinians and the Israelis?

PRESIDENT GEMAYEL: I hope a few weeks. I hope that it will take a few weeks.

HICKEY: From all of Lebanon?

PRESIDENT GEMAYEL: I hope so. I hope so. I hope so. Because, first, the first thing we have to obtain, the withdrawal from Beirut, to recover our capital, our institutions. The capital is very important for us. The capital is actually a occupied land. We have to recover our sovereignty on our capital. And from the capital we could begin discussions for the withdrawal from the whole territory.

HICKEY: Aside from the withdrawal of those foreign forces, you have said that in order to have peace in Lebanon, the country, Lebanon itself, must be unified.

PRESIDENT GEMAYEL: Yes.

HICKLEY: What guarantees can you give, or are you giving, the Muslim community that they will have the same rights as anyone else?

PRESIDENT GEMAYEL: I'll tell you that the real guaranty for the Muslim is my -- that's my person. I am the guaranty for the Muslim. My election is their guaranty. And they are in confidence. The Muslim feel that I could be their guaranty, for this reason: I obtained the unanimity of the Parliament during my election. I obtained the full support and the full -- the full support of the Muslim during the presidential election. I obtained hundred percent of the Muslim votes in the Parliament. And that is a big responsibility, but also a big hope for the future.

HICKEY: Do you have plans to eliminate the division between East and West Beirut, the Green Line, to get rid of the checkpoints, to open Beirut as one city?

PRESIDENT GEMAYEL: We started a very important move, receiving yesterday the Mufti Khalid (?), the chief of the Sunnite community. And I have very close contacts with many leaders in Lebanon. To obtain the destruction of this notion, of these appellations, East Beirut and West Beirut. We should obtain only one Beirut, no East, no West, only one Beirut, completely unified and completely safe. That's what we are trying to obtain, actually. First of all, the reunification of Beirut, to have the reunification of the administration and the institutions. And from this starting point, we have to work for the complete reunification.

HICKEY: The various Moslem militia have been forced to give up some of their weapons to the Israelis, to the Lebanese Army.

PRESIDENT GEMAYEL: Yes.

HICKEY: The Christian militia is still well-armed. Will the Christian militia be forced to lay down their weapons too?

PRESIDENT GEMAYEL: My dear friend, first of all, our militias, the militias of the Kattaya (?) Party, of the Lebanese forces, they took arms only by reaction. They react against the Palestinian presence in Lebanon, the illegal Palestinian presence in Lebanon, helped by many foreign forces. For this reason, some people in Lebanon took arms to prevent -- to protect their life, their country, their villages, etcetera. And when the pretext will disappear, at this time also the arms in their hand, also it will disappear.

If you know the people, the armed people, they are student, doctor, engineer, and they would like to return to their professional activities as soon as possible. And I will try to give the official security to everybody. And the Lebanese Army

will be the protector of everybody, the protector of the Muslim and of the Christians, of the independence and sovereignty of Lebanon. And everybody will be very, very happy to care about their family, about their professional activities, and to forget this bad page, this black page in our national history.

HICKEY: Your brother Bashir, before his death, appeared to be making an effort toward that same unification. What did his assassination do to the plans for Lebanon?

PRESIDENT GEMAYEL: We don't like to look -- to look at the past, after the past. We would like to look after the future. Now we -- some services in the government and in the Lebanese forces are investigating about this death. And we hope that we could have a quick report about this thing.

The consequences. Bashir was working for the unity of Lebanon, the sovereignty of Lebanon. And his death was -- after his death, we saw a real unanimity in Lebanon around his feeling and around his goals. And actually, I will promote more and more this goal and aims.

HICKEY: Are you concerned about your own safety?

PRESIDENT GEMAYEL: You know, you have only God who protects. We could take measures, we could be careful, but only God could save the people.

HICKEY: You have formed an investigating committee to look into the massacre in the Palestinian camps. There have been many accusations made, as you well know.

PRESIDENT GEMAYEL: You have also many rumors.

HICKEY: And many rumors.

PRESIDENT GEMAYEL: Yes.

HICKEY: Israel says it was elements of the Christian militia, the Lebanese forces. Survivors say it was elements of the militia of Saad Haddad.

I must ask you, sir. Were any of the Lebanese forces involved?

PRESIDENT GEMAYEL: I gave a statement a few days ago that the Lebanese forces, or the Kattaya Party, are not at all involved in this matter. And we started the investigation to know exactly what is the truth. But what I can assure you, that no orders was given to the Lebanese forces or to the Kattaya Party to be where those massacres was, or were.

HICKEY: President Gemayel, do you intend to sign a peace treaty with Israel?

PRESIDENT GEMAYEL: I am against the artificial peace treaty. First of all, it's not myself who has to sign. We are a democracy. We have a government. We have a parliament. And such kind of thing, such kind of big decision should be taken by the government and approved by the parliament. For this reason, is early to talk about this point.

But what I can assure you, that I am for the real peace. I am with the peace between people. I am with the peace between all the countries in the Middle East. We need to reach the real peace, not an artificial peace.

HICKEY: How, exactly, do you see the relationship between Lebanon and the United States?

PRESIDENT GEMAYEL: We believe on the same principles and human values. We believe that the best system is the democracy, the freedom. And we would like to promote such kind of principles and values. And I think that that's the aim of the American people.

What we are doing, President Reagan and myself, that's to promote more such kind of relations, in the interest of our two people, our two countries, but also in the interest of those principles, human principles and values for which we are working, and to bring the real peace in the Middle East, in the service of those same values and principles.